

THE
WAY OF SALVATION

ILLUSTRATED IN

A SERIES OF DISCOURSES

BY

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SERMON XVI.

THE ATONEMENT AS FITTED TO GIVE PEACE TO A CONVICTED SINNER.

I JOHN i. 7.—“The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.”

IN the previous discourses we have been conducted to the great inquiry respecting the gospel,—What are its provisions and arrangements to save the guilty? The gospel is a system *to save sinners*. This is its grand peculiarity; with reference to this all its arrangements are adjusted, and all other things that are connected with it are subsidiary to this, or collateral to it. The question, we are to suppose, which was before the Divine Mind in originating this scheme was, *How may arrangements be made to save the guilty?* This is the position which a speculative inquirer ought to take when he examines the gospel; this the point from which a convicted sinner ought to look at the gospel; this the point from which infidels and Christians should regard it.

The inquiry relates now, not so much to the speculative philosopher, the infidel, or the Christian, as to the convicted and guilty sinner. When *he* looks into this revealed plan, what does he see to meet his case? He turns away from all other things as furnishing a hope of salvation; he despairs of every other method; he is condemned by the law of God and by his own conscience; he feels that he is to die, and that there is a God of justice before whom he must soon appear; he looks out tremblingly on a dark and dreaded eternity; and he comes to the Bible, as a professed revelation from God, to find something that will meet his case. What is the way of salvation which it reveals for a lost sinner?

Foremost in all its revelations he sees Christ and his cross. All the great statements in that book arrange themselves around one truth—that a Savior has died; that an atonement has been made. Every promise of pardon is originated there; all the assurances of Divine mercy have their sources there; all that is said of justification and sanctification is founded on that work; all the invitations, encouragements, and assurances of favor in the book are based on that. Everything that is said in the book about the salvation of a sinner may be regarded as concentrated and embodied in my text:—“The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.”

What can be more important for us sinners than to consider this? Yet I do not propose to discuss the doctrine of the *atonement*, as such, as I should feel myself called upon to attempt to do if I were addressing myself to infidels and philosophers. I should then regard myself as bound to endeavor at least to vindicate the doctrine from objections; to demonstrate its consistency with law; to show why it is not found in a scheme of human administration; to exhibit the defects of all human governments without it; to prove that man has everywhere shown that he has felt his need of it; and to convince such men that it, in fact, maintains the harmony of justice and mercy in a moral government. But these, however great and important in themselves, would be points foreign to the present position to which we are brought in the progress of this discussion. We are now to look at the atonement as *a revealed arrangement to meet the condition of a convicted sinner*. The inquiry is, how that meets his case; how that will lay the foundation for restoration to peace.

To see the real point of this inquiry, you are to recollect the state of the sinner as it has been illustrated. The following points, then, are to be borne in remembrance:—(1.) He has violated the law of God, and is in fact, and in feeling, a guilty man. (2.) He cannot now *change the fact* that he has sinned, for that is to remain historically true for ever, whatever may be the consequences. (3.) He cannot repair the wrong done to a violated law; the wrong done to society; the wrong done to his own soul and to his Maker. (4.) He cannot, by any act of his, now remove the penalty—for that has a connection with the violation of the law which the offender cannot himself dissolve. (5.) He cannot urge any *claim* to pardon—for pardon is never a matter of *claim*, and a violator of law is dependent on sovereignty.

The inquiry then is, What does the death of Christ—the atonement—do to meet this case? It is my wish, as well as I am able, and as simply and plainly as possible, to explain this. There are substantially but two inquiries:—I. What is meant by the atonement? And, II. What is accomplished by it in the salvation of a sinner?

I. The first inquiry is, *What is meant by the atonement?* What is the idea when it is said that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin? What in all those passages which speak of him, as “a propitiation” for sin; as giving himself a “ransom for many;” as dying in the place of sinners; as being “made a curse for us;” as “bearing our sins in his own body on the tree;” as being our “peace,” and as “reconciling us to God?” What may we suppose Paul preached among the Corinthians when he resolved to “know nothing among them but Jesus Christ and him crucified?”

It seems proper, in order to a clear understanding of this, to state, first, what the atonement is *not*, or what we should *not* expect to find in it,—for the hope of heaven, so far as based on the atonement, or on anything else, should not be founded on *falsehood*, but on *truth*. No false view on any subject will be of value to a man on his final trial.

We have seen, by an incidental remark already made, that there are *some* things in regard to sin and the sinner which cannot be done by the atonement or by any other arrangement. They are, that the historical fact of the commission of sin cannot now be changed; that it will always remain true of the sinner that he *has* violated the law of God, and is a guilty man; that the wrong cannot now be repaired, since there is a wrong done by the very act of sin which nothing subsequent can entirely remove, however it may be overruled; and that nothing can now be done by which the offender can urge, in any proper sense, a *claim* to pardon.

In addition, I wish now to state the following things as points not contemplated by an atonement, and which the sinner is not to expect to find *in* the atonement. I state them because they are sometimes supposed by an inquirer to be a part of the atonement, and because there are sometimes representations made by the friends of Christianity as if they were; and because the enemies of the atonement sometimes evince a desire to represent these things as constituting a part of it.

(a) The atonement, then, does not *change* God, or make him a different Being from what he was. He is in nowise, now that the atonement is made, a different Being from what he was before, or from what he would have been if the atonement had not been made; he will never be a different Being from what he now is, and always has been, whatever may be the destiny of man. He is no more benevolent, no more disposed to show mercy now, than he was before the atonement was made; he was no more disposed to do justice then, or to punish offenders, than he is now, and always will be. It is a great principle in all correct views of God that he is, in all respects, unchangeably the same, “without variableness or shadow of turning;” and this principle is to be held in all its integrity in relation to every doctrine of natural or revealed religion.

(b) Similar to this, and growing out of it, is a second thought, that the atonement is not designed, so to speak, *to buy God over to mercy*; to make a Being before harsh and stern and severe, mild; or to melt a heart, naturally hard, to compassion. I do not deny that there have been representations by even the friends of Christianity which would bear the interpretation that this is their belief; and I do not deny that some of the language of our sacred poetry is liable to this construction. Thus such language is found in our own Watts, whose devotional poems are in general so correct in sentiment, and so well adapted to express the feelings of true piety:—

“Rich were the drops of Jesus' blood,
That *calm'd his frowning face*;
That sprinkled o'er the burning throne,
And *turn'd the wrath to grace.*”

In this language the representation undoubtedly is, that God was originally stern and unforgiving; and that he has been *made* mild and forgiving by that "blood" of atonement which "calmed his frowning face." It cannot be denied that such representations as this would be conveyed by the language used sometimes in the pulpit; or that there *are* views of the death of Christ prevailing in the Christian church which would justify such a construction.

But these views *cannot* be correct; and those who use such language must do it, as Watts seems to have done, under the influence of warm poetic or devotional feeling, where the language conveys more than it was possible in their soberer moments to believe to be true; or else they hold views of the atonement which can in no way be vindicated. God cannot change. He cannot be a different Being from what he always has been. He cannot be bought over to mercy by blood. He never has been a stern and inexorable Being, and then made mild and forgiving by the death of his Son. The human mind is so made that it cannot believe that doctrine; and no man can be required to go and proclaim such a doctrine to mankind. The true statement on this point will be seen from another part of this discourse. It is, in a word, that God was always merciful, benevolent, and kind; but that, in his government, as in all governments, there existed obstacles to the pardon of the guilty lying in eternal justice, and in the necessity of maintaining the authority of law; that until these were removed he could not consistently make a proclamation of mercy; that in order to remove them, he gave his Son to die; and that the gift of his Son, therefore, was just an expression of the eternal benevolence of his character; a proof, not that he was originally stern and severe, and that he was *made* mild and forgiving by the atonement, but that he was so mild and benevolent that he was willing to stoop to any sacrifice, but that of truth and justice, to save a lost world.

(c) A third thought sometimes supposed to be a part of the doctrine of the atonement, but not properly connected with it, is, that Christ died to endure the strict and proper penalty of the law. But it is equally plain that this cannot be, and that men cannot be required to believe it; and that when they profess to believe it, they either have no clear ideas of what they profess to believe, or use language without any definite signification. The penalty of the law in the case of transgression is what the law appoints as an expression of the evil of the offence, and as designed to give sanction to the law and to maintain it. The proper penalty of the law can be borne by the offender only, and cannot be transferred to another. A substitute may bear something in the place of the penalty, or something which shall answer the same end; but when a man offends, the law threatens *him*, and no other. It was not true, either, that the law which man had violated ever threatened, as its specific penalty, a death on a cross; and it was not true that the Savior endured *on* that cross what properly enters into the notion of the penalty of the law. It was not true that he suffered remorse of conscience; it was not true that he suffered eternal death; it cannot be believed that, in those short hours, he endured as *much* pain as all the wicked for whom he died would have endured in the horrors of an eternal hell. And, moreover, if he *had* endured the literal penalty of the law, no small part of the glory of the *atonement* would have been taken away. If this had been so, the short account of the whole transaction would be, that the entireness of guilt and punishment were transferred from the guilty to the innocent, and that there had been no gain to the universe, since all the punishment originally threatened had been rigidly inflicted, not indeed on those who deserved it, but on One who did *not* deserve it.

Laying these things, therefore, out of view, as not necessary in any just conceptions of the atonement, and as inconsistent with any proper view of that great work, the simple statement of it is, that it is an arrangement designed, by the substituted sufferings and death of the Lord Jesus Christ, to make the exercise of mercy towards the guilty consistent with justice and the honor of law; or an arrangement which will make it proper for God to exercise the original mercy of his nature consistently with a due regard to the stability of his government, and a due expression of his hatred of sin. The origin of the atonement is the *benevolence*, not the *justice* of God; the object aimed at is the manifestation of that

benevolence consistently *with* justice; it would not have been resorted to, if benevolence towards the guilty could have been properly exercised without it.

II. We are led, then, in the second place, to inquire *what it in fact accomplishes in the plan of salvation*.

I look upon it, so far as it comes before the mind of a sinner convinced of guilt, and inquiring how peace and salvation may be found, as having two great features. First, it is an expression of the willingness of God to pardon the guilty; and, secondly, it is a device for removing the obstacles to pardon, so as to make the forgiveness of sin consistent with justice and truth.

First. It is an expression of the willingness of God to pardon the guilty. It is in this light that a sinner convicted of sin will naturally look at it; it is with reference to this that he will study it. The grand question which he wishes now to be solved, and which *must* now be solved, if he ever finds peace, is this: whether he may hope that God will be *willing* to forgive offenders against his law. It is not whether he is benevolent in general; or whether he is just and true; but it is specifically whether he is willing to forgive the sin which now gives the inquirer so much trouble, and to receive one conscious of guilt to his favor. This is the question which the child asks respecting a parent whose law he has violated; this is the question which the offender against a human law asks when he confesses his guilt, and throws himself upon the mercy of his country; this is the question which is asked all over the heathen world, when the worshippers there, conscious of guilt, come with bloody sacrifices to their altars; and this is the question which the sinner everywhere asks, when convicted of sin, and when he feels that he deserves to be banished to the abodes of despair.

Now a simple and single declaration on the part of God *might* have settled that question for ever, and put the agitations of a troubled soul at once to rest, even if nothing were said about the way in which such a declaration could consistently be made. But that is not the method which has been in fact adopted. What I beg your particular attention to is the fact, that all the offers of pardon in our world, and all the assurances of the Divine mercy to the guilty, have come through the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ—through the atonement.

(a) If you go *outside* of that, or look anywhere else, where will you see *evidence*, where will you find an *assurance*, that God is willing to pardon the guilty? If you go to the heathen of ancient or modern times, none of their oracles give any assurance that pardon can be obtained from an offended God; from not one of their priests could a response be obtained that would give peace to a troubled conscience. If you go to an infidel, *he* has no communication that will give peace to such a conscience. All the assurances in the Bible he on principle rejects, and he professes to have none that can be a substitute in their place. If you open the Koran, the Shastra, the Vedas, the Zend-Avesta, you meet no assurance on which you can rely as a communication from Heaven, that God is willing to forgive the violator of his laws. If you ask the philosopher, he has nothing to say on this point, but will rather endeavor to convince you that you do not *need* pardon,—that you should attempt to discipline your own soul to meet the trials of this life, and to be ready for the future, and not to trouble yourself about feelings that spring up from the indulgence of the passions implanted in you by your Maker. As to *pardon*, in the proper sense of the term,—as to *forgiveness*, such as a convicted sinner feels that he needs,—all these oracles, priests, and philosophers, are dumb.

(b) But how is this matter presented in the atonement made by Christ? The inquiry of the mind is, whether God is willing to pardon him who has violated his law, and who is troubled at the remembrance of the past, and in anticipation of the future. There is much, it would be idle to deny, that is mysterious in the incarnation of the Son of God, and in the atonement made by Him: and what is there that comes before the minds of mortals that is divested of mystery? There are many questions which the sinner, in the state of mind in which I am supposing him to be, is not yet able to solve, if he ever will be in this life, or *ever afterwards*. But, in reference to the *main* matter,—to the great inquiry which perplexes him—to the question whether God is *willing* to pardon a sinner—to the disclosure of the character of God with

this view, made by the gift of a Savior and by his death on the cross,—the following things are so plain in the Bible that there can be no doubt of them in his mind, and they are of such a nature as just to meet his case:—

(1.) The atonement is, on the part of God, an expression of mere *benevolence*—a gift of love: “God so loved the world *that he gave* his only—begotten Son.” He did not give him because there was a claim on him; he did not give him that he might in some mysterious way be made merciful;—nor did the Savior come that he might change the character of his Father, and make an inexorable being mild and kind; or that he might buy him over to mercy by his sacrifice; —but God gave him because he loved the world, and as the expression of his original and eternal benevolence.

(2.) It is the highest possible expression of benevolence. For, to use human language, what higher expression of love can there be than for a father to give an only, a much—beloved son? And when has there been in a human soul benevolence of so high an order as to be willing to give up a son to die for such an object? What earthly monarch has ever occupied a throne who would be willing to give up a much—beloved son to death, to save his guilty subjects from deserved punishment? In our own land—rich as it has been in examples of benevolence and self—sacrifice—what judge has ever been seated on the bench who, to save the convicted murderer at his bar, much as there might be in his youth, or beauty, or high connexions, or endowments, to excite sympathy, would be willing to give an only son to occupy his vacated place on the gallows? Who would give up his child to save an enemy; who, even to save a friend? His own life he might give for his friend; but who would give himself for his foe? “For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us,” Rom. v. 7, 8. And when the trembling and anxious sinner looks upward toward the eternal throne, and asks for a proof of love—for some intimation that God is willing to pardon—for something that shall soothe his feelings with the assurance that God is a God of mercy, and is slow to anger, and is not willing that the sinner should die,—here he sees it—sees all that the soul can ask—sees all that it can conceive of as a high expression of love.

(3.) Contemplating the death of Christ with reference to the question of so much interest to him, whether God is willing to pardon the guilty, he meets the assurance everywhere in the Bible that the sacrifice of Christ was made for all men. “God loved the world.” “One died for all.” “By the grace of God he tasted death for every man.” “If I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men unto me.” “He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins *of the whole world.*” He came that “whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

Nothing is plainer in the Bible than that the atonement was, in some proper sense, made for all mankind. That it is so is stated in language so plain that it would seem not possible to mistake it; in language as plain as any found in the creeds of those churches which profess to believe the doctrine; in language as plain as any ever employed by those who wish to defend the doctrine; in words so plain that if it be admitted that it was intended to teach it, it would not be possible to do it in human language unless that actually employed in the Bible teaches it. It was an offering made for the race. It was a gift for a fallen world. It had respect not so much to individuals as to the law, the perfections, and the government of God. It was an opening of the way of pardon; a method of making forgiveness consistent; a device for preserving truth; a scheme for “magnifying the law and making it honorable;” an arrangement—such as has been wanted in all human governments, but which has been found in none—by which he who forgives can be at the same time strictly just. It is, therefore, as applicable to one individual as to another; for, having made arrangements for securing these great interests in the salvation of one soul, the arrangement is necessarily one that may be extended to all.

The full benefit of this atonement, therefore, is offered to all men—to each and all of the human family. God makes the offer; and he makes it in sincerity and in good faith; and he expects that his views

and feelings in. this will be respected and honored by all who presume to speak in his name. He has never commissioned any class of men to make a partial offer of salvation; to limit the invitation to any favored class—few or many—of mankind; to show any special respect in this matter to any rank, to any complexion, to any kindred or tongue. He has commissioned his servants to go and preach the gospel to “every creature;” that is, the good news that salvation is provided for them—for in no other sense would it be the gospel to them. He that does not do this; that goes to offer the gospel to a part only; to elect persons only; or that teaches that God offers the gospel only to a certain portion of mankind, violates his commission, practically charges God with insincerity, and makes the language which God has used with such apparent plainness, delusive, ambiguous, or unmeaning. It is never to be forgotten that the offer of salvation is not made by man, but by God. The offer stands recorded in his own word; the business of the ambassador is to go and proclaim that, and that only. It is the risen Savior’s commission—his solemn charge, when he was about to ascend to heaven—that the offer of salvation should be made to every creature. It is not the fault of his commission, or to be traced to any limitation in the merits of the atonement, that all that dwell upon the earth have not heard it:—that every Hindu, African, and Islander has not long since been told that he might be saved through a Savior’s blood.

I assume the free and full offer of the gospel to all men to be one of those cardinal points of the system by which all other views of truth are to be determined. It is the corner—stone of the whole edifice; that which makes it so glorious to God, and so full of good—will to men. For one, I hold no doctrines, and never can hold any, which will seem to me inconsistent with the free and full offer of salvation to every human being, or which will bind my hands, or palsy my tongue, or freeze my heart, when I stand before sinners to tell them of a dying Savior. I have no fellow—feeling for any other gospel; I have no “right hand of fellowship” to extend to any scheme that does not teach that God sincerely offers all the bliss of heaven to every child of Adam—be he a Caffrarian, a Hindu, a Laplander; a beggar, or a king; a man of wealth, learning, and respectability, or an abandoned wretch;—to the man that, by the grace of God, will ultimately reach heaven, and to the man that by his own fault will wander forever as an outcast on the plains of despair.

This scheme of salvation I regard as offered to the world, as freely as the light of heaven, or the rains that burst on the mountains, or the swellings of broad rivers and streams, or the bubblings of fountains in the desert. And though millions to whom it is offered do not receive it, and are not savingly benefited by it, though in regard to them the provisions of the plan may be said to be, in a certain sense, in vain, yet this result does not stand alone in the arrangements of God. I see in this the hand of the same God that pours the beams of noonday on barren sands, that sends showers on desert rocks, and that gives bubbling springs where no man is—to our eyes, but not to his, in vain. It is the overflowing of benevolence, the richness of the Divine mercy; the profusion of the gifts of the Creator, the fullness of compassion, that can afford thus to flow over all the earth—even on wastes and solitudes; for the ocean of love which supplies all can never be exhausted or diminished.

I have thus endeavored to show that the atonement made by the Savior meets the awakened and convicted sinner as a practical expression of the willingness of God to pardon the guilty; as answering a question which the mind must ask in that state, whether it is right for men to hope in the mercy of God, or whether there is mercy for the lost.

Second. The other aspect, as I remarked, in which the atonement is presented in the Bible, is, that it is a device or scheme, on the part of God, for removing the obstacles under a moral government to the exercise of pardon, and for making the forgiveness of a sinner consistent with the maintenance of the honor of the law, and with justice and truth. This will open before us these inquiries: What are the obstacles in a government to the exercise of pardon; what devices are resorted to in human governments to meet these difficulties; and how the atonement removes the difficulties, and makes it consistent for God to pardon the guilty?

It was my intention to enter on this inquiry, and to complete it in this discourse; but I must reserve it for the ensuing.

In conclusion, and as a proper application of this part of the subject, I beg leave to ask your attention to one particular point; it is this:—that this view of the atonement meets an anxious inquiry which has always been made by the human mind, and which must continue to be one of the important questions before our race. It is, whether God is willing to pardon the guilty; whether those who are conscious of having violated his law may come to him with the hope that he will forgive them. Now, taking the race at large—embracing the ancient Hebrew people, the ancient and modern heathen world, and the multitudes who have resided, and do reside in Christian lands—I do not know that there is any one question that has interested so many minds, or interested them so deeply, as this. I admit that there have been many in all these lands who have felt no immediate interest in it, and whose attention could not be awakened to it; I admit that there are many who profess to look upon the inquiry as superfluous, and many who profess to consider it a question which could not be answered; I admit that it is not a question which has been extensively considered in the books of philosophy; and I admit that there have been other inquiries that have excited a more immediate, and, for the time, a deeper interest in many minds than this. But I am speaking of the race at large; and what I am saying is, that there is no one question that has, in one way or another, excited so deep an interest as this. It was the origin of all the sacrifices of the Hebrews. It lies at the foundation of all the bloody rites of the heathen. It is the source of all the pilgrimages and penances—the fastings and scourgings—the self—torture by uncomfortable postures, by iron beds, and by hair—cloth, among the Papists. It is the explanation of swinging on hooks, and holding the hand in one position till the muscles become immovably rigid, and walking on sharp spikes, and sacrificing children, among the heathen. And it is the cause of the anxious inquiry of the man convinced of sin in Christian lands, and under the full light of science and religion, how he may be saved. No man can be convinced that he is himself a sinner, and not ask this question; and there is no man who may not be convinced that he is a sinner; no one, I believe, who at some time will not be. It is a question which men ask in solitude—in the shades of evening, in the gloom of midnight, when the remembrance of long—forgotten guilt comes stealing over them; it is a question which men ask when in sudden danger, and when they feel that they are soon probably to be called into the presence of an offended God; it is a question which men ask when, under the preaching of the gospel, their sins are plainly set before them; it is a question which is asked with the deepest possible interest when the Spirit of God descends with power on a community in a revival of religion; it is a question which a man who has been careless, and worldly, and wicked in his life, asks with the intensest interest on the bed of death. *Can the Maker of the world show mercy?* is the great inquiry—the leading, prominent inquiry—that has stood before the minds of men. Will he pardon a transgressor of his law? Can a guilty being trust in his compassion? May one who is conscious of deep criminality, and who is soon to stand before him in judgment, hope for his favor? Can the past be forgiven? Can peace be restored to a soul, when conscience is doing its fearful work? Oh! where shall an answer be found to these questions? From what hidden recesses; from what shrines, and oracles; from what sacred groves; from what deeps of earth or of the blue ether; from what lips of the living, and from what whisperings of the “pale and sheeted dead,” shall the answer come?

I believe that the answer—the sole and sufficient answer to all these questions is found in the Cross of my Redeemer. I see there—in the gift of such a Savior; in the avowed design of his coming; in the wonderful work of the atonement which he performed—an assurance that God loves a guilty race, and that he is ready to pardon. What more do I need than the assurance of the Son of God? What other confirmation of it do I demand than what I have in his agony and bloody sweat, his cross and passion? Mystery still there may be on a thousand questions pertaining to the Divine administration; and a thousand questions I might wish to ask even about *this* work, but the main inquiry is answered. I am assured there that God loved the world. I am assured that my Redeemer died, that God might show his

willingness to pardon. I am assured that he tasted death for every man. I am assured that whosoever will may take the water of life freely. The agitations of my soul die away; my mind settles down into peace; my fears subside; I can look calmly up to God, calmly to the grave, calmly to the eternal future;—for the great question in which I feel more interest than in all others is answered—whether I, a sinner, may hope in the mercy of my God!

SERMON XVII.

THE ATONEMENT AS IT REMOVES THE OBSTACLES IN THE WAY OF PARDON.

COL. i. 20.— “Having made peace through the blood of his cross.”

IN the last discourse I entered on the consideration of the *atonement* as an arrangement, under the Divine administration, for giving to a mind troubled with the consciousness of guilt a sound and permanent peace. I stated that the atonement is a device in the Divine government by which God designs to evince the benevolence of his nature in the pardon of the guilty, while at the same time he manifests a due regard to law, to truth, and to justice. The atonement, as then remarked, is founded primarily in the *benevolence*, and not in the *justice* of God; or it is a way by which benevolence can be manifested without impairing or endangering the interests of justice. As viewed by one who is condemned by his own conscience, and by the law of God, by one who feels that he is exposed to the Divine displeasure, and who is conscious of the need of pardon, which is the true point of view from which to contemplate the sacrifice made by the Lord Jesus Christ, the atonement has two aspects:—one, as it shows a sinner that God is willing to pardon; the other, as it removes the obstacles in the way of pardon.

The former of these points was then considered. I showed, (1,) that it is the expression of mere benevolence—guilty man having no *claim* to any such interposition; (2,) that it is the *highest* proof of benevolence which God could furnish; and, (3,) that it is benevolence shown to the *whole* race, and that, therefore, any and every sinner is free to avail himself of all the benefits of it.

I proceed now to consider the atonement in the other aspect mentioned, as removing the obstacles to pardon. It is important to our purpose to keep in remembrance this point, that we are considering the case of a sinner conscious of guilt and danger, and inquiring whether he may be pardoned and saved. Such a man wishes the assurance that he may be forgiven; he desires to understand how it is that the atonement avails to secure his pardon. He wishes to know that God is willing to forgive; he wishes to see how it is consistent for a God of truth and justice to do it. The former inquiry is answered by the fact of the gift of a Savior, and by the Divine invitations; the latter is the point that now presents itself for our consideration.

In this inquiry there are two points:—I. What are the hindrances to the pardon of a sinner? and, II. How does the atonement remove those hindrances, and give peace to the mind of the guilty?

I. The first inquiry is, *What are the hindrances to the pardon of a sinner?*

I have already, in the former discourses, said enough to show you that those hindrances, whatever they may be, do not consist of any unwillingness on the part of God to pardon the guilty; and that, whatever may be the effect of an atonement, it is not intended to change God; or to make him a different Being from what he was before; or to buy him over to mercy; or to make a Being—before stern, inexorable, and unforgiving—mild, gentle, merciful, and kind. If any such ideas were involved in the atonement, I do not see how it would be possible for the human mind to embrace it.

Laying all such ideas out of view in contemplating the atonement, I will proceed, in as plain and simple a manner as is possible, to state what are the real hindrances to the pardon of a sinner.

They are such as arise from the nature of moral government, and are found under all forms of administration. In all governments there are great difficulties in regard to *pardon*, and more embarrassment is felt in adjusting it aright, than perhaps on any other subject. It is supposed, indeed, in all governments but those of tyrants, that there would be cases where pardon would be desirable; where the law, if suffered to take its course, would seem to be severe; where the real welfare of the community would be promoted, as well as the promptings of humanity obeyed, by extending forgiveness to the guilty; and where it would be desirable to leave a discretionary power on this subject to the executive officer of the government—to the sovereign power whose law has been violated. But it has never been found practicable to adjust this satisfactorily under any human administration, or to free the subject from difficulties.

The difficulties in the case—and in stating these, I am stating what exist under *all* forms of government, parental, civil, and Divine—are such as I will now refer to. (1.) One is, where pardon is *never* exercised; where it is a settled and unchanging maxim of the law, that no offender, under any circumstances, is ever to be forgiven. This *might* be, although I am ignorant that even under the darkest forms of tyranny any such principle has been avowed as the settled maxim of the administration, however it may have been practically acted on by some, as under the government of Draco, or under some forms of Oriental despotism, or by the Papal communion in the times of the Inquisition. But still it is conceivable that it *might be*, and such a government, without any mixture of the element of benevolence, would be severely and sternly and wholly just. But almost any form of tyranny would be less dreadful than this; for justice would establish its dominion at the expense of some of the finest feelings of our nature, and violate some of the plainest dictates of our moral being. There *are* cases, even cases of undoubted violation of law, where pardon is desirable; where all the benevolent feelings of a community would be gratified by forgiveness; and where all the tender feelings of humanity would be outraged if pardon were *never* extended. In the case of a single individual offender in Great Britain, thirty thousand signatures were easily obtained asking for the pardon of a man who had, in a single case, committed an offence against the laws of the land: in all communities there are cases in which the purest and best citizens are willing to unite in such petitions. All communities, as already remarked, entrust a pardoning power to the executive or the judges. As human nature now is, no man would wish to live under a government where it was an assumed principle that pardon was *never* to be extended to the guilty; no man would contribute his influence to organize a government under which *no* guilty person might ever hope to be forgiven. This difficulty is one that would arise under a government that was severely and sternly *just*. (2.) A difficulty not less, but of an opposite character, would exist if it were an admitted principle that *all* the guilty were to be pardoned; that every offender against the laws was to be forgiven, and was to be permitted to go at large. This too *might* be; but all can imagine what would be the effect of such an administration. This, not less than the former, would violate deep principles of our nature;

this, more than that, would endanger the welfare of a community. For, if there are principles in our nature which would make it *desirable* that some should be pardoned, there are principles which *demand* that some shall be punished. If all were pardoned, if all the guilty were suffered to go at large, what man's property would be safe—what man's reputation—what man's life? What would be the condition of things in this or in any community, if all jails and penitentiaries were thrown open, and, if all convicted and unconvicted felons were sent forth upon the community? Who would lie down calmly at night? Who would not gather up his property and flee from such a land? Law would be a bugbear; and every form of crime would be committed under the sanction of a spurious and wretched benevolence. *This* difficulty would arise if justice were *never* executed, and all the guilty were pardoned: and as a case has never occurred where it was an assumed maxim that *none* were to be pardoned, so in our world the case of a government has never occurred where it was an assumed maxim that pardon is to be extended indiscriminately to *o*. Yet, (3), there is another difficulty still. It is this: pardon in all cases does so much, even under the best arrangements that governments can make, to weaken the strong arm of the law. The influence in every case where it can be exercised is to lessen the moral power of the law; to diminish the public respect for its sanctions; to make offenders cease to dread the punishment which it threatens; and in general to produce a want of respect for the law in a community. It is of the nature of a public proclamation that crime *may* be committed in some cases with impunity; and as the cases are not specified, and as no one is excluded, the practical effect must be that each offender, whatever crime he may commit, will feel that *he* may be among the number of those who will escape the infliction of the penalty. Two things operate widely in every community to induce men to feel that the laws may be violated, and that crimes may be committed without the danger of punishment:—one is, the hope that so generally prevails among that class of men, that they will escape detection; the other,—a feeling, perhaps, as effective in producing conscious security,—is the hope that, if the crime is brought home to them, they *may* be pardoned.

What is needed in the case is, some arrangement that shall prevent this effect, and yet make pardon practicable and proper; that is, something that shall do honor to the decisions of the law, and that shall at the same time meet the promptings of benevolence; in other words, that shall secure respect for the law and the government, and yet shall make it consistent, practicable, and safe, to pardon an offender. This effect will be secured if the sanctions of the law—considered as designed to express the views of the lawgiver as to the evil of the offence, or as designed to restrain from sin, or as designed to reform offenders, or as calculated to subserve any other purpose contemplated by the infliction of penalty—can be secured, while at the same time the government is free to indulge the promptings of humanity, and to release an acknowledged offender from the infliction of the penalty. These objects, so different in their nature, have never been blended in a human administration. As the one or the other has prevailed, government has manifested a character either of severity or weakness; of tyranny or feebleness; of blood, like that of Draco, or of imbecility, where there is neither respect for the law, dread of punishment, nor restraint on crime.

In all human governments hitherto—and what has been true heretofore in this respect will be true to the end of time—there have been substantially but two cases in which the executive is entrusted with the power of pardon. The one is, where the sentence of the law may be regarded as too *severe*; that is, where, to use the words of Blackstone in reference to the provisions of a court of equity—“Since in laws all cases cannot be foreseen or expressed, it is necessary that when the general decrees of the law come to be applied to particular cases, there should be somewhere a power vested of defining those circumstances, which, had they been foreseen, the legislator himself would have expressed.”—*Com. i. 62*. Such cases occur under all forms of human government, and under the best administration of the laws, for there are mitigating circumstances which could not have been foreseen in framing the laws; and as law is general in its nature, and not framed with reference to particular cases, the well-known maxim of the law, *Summum jus summa injuria est*, is often illustrated in the actual administration of justice. There is a propriety, therefore, that a power of remitting the penalty—improperly called a *pardoning* power—should be lodged in the hands of the executive in a state. And yet it is to be observed that this is not, in any proper sense of the word, *pardon*. It is simply a declaration, made under the authority of law, that the sentence in the case was too severe; that the penalty appointed should not be inflicted; that, in fact, no such crime as that of which the alleged offender has been convicted has been committed; and that of right he *ought* to be discharged. It might be true that *some* offence has been committed, and that it would have been right to have inflicted a lighter penalty, but the so-called act of pardon in this case is a proclamation that *this* penalty has not been deserved, and therefore it is clear that there has been no act of pardon as such. It is simply an acknowledgment of the imperfection of the best forms of human administration, and an act at the same time setting the government right, and the alleged offender right, before the community. Whatever honor is done to the law in the case is not in connection with *pardon*, but it is a declaration that the law has made arrangements, so far as practicable, by which undeserved penalties shall not be inflicted.

The only other case of pardon in a human government occurs where an undoubted crime has been committed; where the offender has been tried, convicted, and sentenced; where it would be right to inflict the penalty of the law, and where, notwithstanding this, the law has entrusted the exercise of pardon to the discretion of the executive. Such cases, it must be admitted, often occur. Men of acknowledged guilt, after conviction as the result of a full and fair trial, and long before the term of sentence expires, are discharged from prison and turned upon the community practically unpunished according to the just notion of the law, and without the slightest evidence that the punishment, as far as inflicted, has had any reforming power. Nothing is done to prevent the effects of pardon noticed before; nothing is done, so far as the pardon is concerned, to maintain the authority of law; nothing is done to reform the offender; nothing is done to deter others from the commission of a similar offence. It is simply a proclamation that crime *may* be committed with impunity. To whatever it may be traced, whether to the weakness of the executive, or to the prevalent sentiments in a community demanding the frequent exercise of pardon; or to what may be regarded as the promptings of humanity or benevolence; or to a weakened sense of justice—to a feeling that punishment is

essential tyranny, and that all punishment is a violation of the dictates of humanity — it is, in fact, a public proclamation that crime may be committed without the dread of punishment—a practical relaxation of all laws, and a practical invitation to all men to commit the crimes to which their passions or their supposed interests may prompt.

In all the devices of human wisdom; in all the forms of administration originated by man; in all the history of the world hitherto, it has never been found practicable to introduce an arrangement like that which is contemplated by the atonement. In no court of justice has such an arrangement ever been attempted, and no legislator has introduced it into the administration of the laws. Sensible as legislators and judges have been of the defects in the administration of law just noticed, they have never attempted, as a fixed and permanent arrangement, to introduce a device like that of the atonement. A *debt* may indeed be paid, and the obligation will be discharged; but no provision has been made by which respect may be shown to the penalty of law, and yet pardon be extended to acknowledged offenders. Whether it has been that legislators have been insensible to the evils now adverted to; or whether they have been disposed to make an experiment to see whether those evils might not be avoided; or whether they have despaired of finding any means by which due honor may be done to the law while the guilty man is acquitted, it is not material now to inquire. The fact is undoubted. No such arrangement has ever been made. History furnishes no traces of such a provision, and no court of justice has ever resorted to it in the administration of law. No one has been appointed, as a permanent legal arrangement, to suffer in the place of another; nowhere does law contemplate the acceptance of substituted sufferings in the place of those incurred by the guilty. The only things done by a human government in the case are the two already referred to: to wit, where an offender is pardoned, as it is termed, because the sentence was too severe; and where one guilty of undoubted crime, and deserving the infliction of the penalty, is discharged without any attempt to maintain the authority of law.

Now it is clear that in the Divine administration pardon can never be extended in either of these forms. It cannot be supposed that in an act of pardon the all-wise Legislator would practically acknowledge that the sentence of the law was too severe—that is, that it was *unjust*,—and that the offender would be discharged on that ground; nor can it be supposed that an acknowledged offender would be acquitted without any respect shown to the law, or any arrangement to prevent the effects on the individual himself, or on the community, of acquitting the offender. It cannot be supposed that God would make' either a practical proclamation that his own law was stern and severe, and that its penalty *ought* not to be inflicted; nor can it be supposed that he would make a practical proclamation that his law is to be disregarded in his own mode of administering it, and that it may become an understood maxim that crime may be committed under his administration with impunity. To suppose this would be to charge on the Divine administration all that has been found to be weak, defective, inefficient, if not partial, in human governments. Whether we may be able or not to see how this difficulty is met, and how these evils are prevented, we may be certain that in a perfect government the difficulties will be met, and that some arrangement will be devised by which the evils may be prevented. This leads us,

II. In the second place, to inquire, *How the atonement meets the difficulties referred to*—or how it removes the hindrances to the pardon of a sinner.

This inquiry is practically whether the atonement so meets the claims of justice, or so evinces respect to the law, that the great ends of moral government can be secured when the penalty is remitted, or when the sinner is pardoned. If these ends can be secured, it is clear that the offender may with propriety be pardoned; and clear also, that, if this is done, his agitated and troubled mind may be at peace. If by the atonement God can as certainly and as fully evince his hatred of sin, and his respect for law, and prevent the evil effects of sin, as he could by the punishment of the sinner himself, then it is plain that the great purposes contemplated by the law and by the appointment of a penalty are accomplished. There are, then, in connection with this, two subordinate inquiries:—What is shown by punishment? and, Can this be shown by the atonement?

(a) What, then, is shown by punishment? What is contemplated by the appointment of penalty? What, in respect to moral government, is secured when the penalty of law is inflicted? In what light does it represent the lawgiver, and what light does it throw on his purpose in appointing the penalty? To these inquiries the brief and obvious answer is, *that the penalty affixed to a law expresses the view of the lawgiver in respect to the evil of the offence.* So far as it is penalty, its design is to convey that idea, and nothing else. It is simply the *measure* of his estimate of the nature and desert of the crime. The penalty must be appointed, moreover, by the lawgiver himself, and must express his sense of the nature and desert of the act of transgression. No one can control him in this; no one can properly estimate the justice of the penalty, unless he is able to comprehend the nature and tendency of the offence as truly as the lawgiver himself; and no creature therefore, in respect to the Divine administration, can possess the qualifications which may be requisite to judge of the propriety of the penalty affixed to law. Much indeed of the design and the effect of punishment may be seen, but there may be depths in regard to it which no created intellect can as yet fathom, and there may be collateral purposes to be accomplished by it which a creature cannot comprehend. The main and central idea however is, that it shows the sense of the lawgiver in respect to the evil of transgression. It is an illustration and a declaration of the view which he takes of it from the stand—point which he occupies as the head of the government, or as presiding over the interests of those who are subject to his administration. The security that the penalty will be just and equal—that it will not be severe or partial—that it will be commensurate merely with the desert of the offence—that it will not be too intense in degree, or too prolonged in duration—is to be found, not in any control which the subject of the law has over it, but solely in the wisdom, the equity, and the benevolence of him who appoints it. It is plain that if the view thus entertained of the evil of transgression can be evinced either by the sufferings of the offender himself, or by anything substituted in the place of those sufferings that shall convey the same practical impression, the great ends of penalty will be accomplished, and the infliction of the penalty on the offender himself may in the latter case be remitted.

(b) This leads, then, to the only remaining inquiry, whether the evil of sin as designed to be expressed by the penalty of the law can be so evinced by the substituted sufferings of another,

or by the atonement, that in respect to the offender himself penalty may be properly remitted; and so remitted that he himself can feel that the same testimony has been borne to the value of law, and to the evil of sin, which would have been furnished by his own personal sufferings. In other words, is it practicable or possible for an offender troubled with the remembrance of personal guilt, and realizing that he is justly exposed to the penalty of a broken law, to feel the same calmness and composure, or the same freedom from apprehended punishment, which he would have felt if it had been possible for him to bear the penalty himself, or which he would if the offence had never been committed? If sin were a *debt* in the literal sense, it is easy to see how this effect might follow;—for it is conceivable that a debt might be so paid by another as to meet all the claims of justice, or to discharge the entire pecuniary responsibility, so that the debtor himself would feel that there was no claim of the law upon him, and so that there would be created in his bosom the highest sense of obligation to him who had interposed to relieve him of a claim which he was unable to meet. It is to be admitted, however, that sin is not precisely of the nature of a debt; and it is to be admitted that there must be other elements in an atonement than those which are involved in the payment of a debt. Can the great end contemplated by the appointment of a penalty, or by the infliction of punishment—to wit, the expression of the Divine view of the evil of sin—be so accomplished by the substituted sufferings, that I, a guilty man—a helpless sinner—an acknowledged violator of law—one feeling that he deserves the infliction of such a penalty as the Lawgiver shall judge to be necessary for the maintenance of moral government—can feel that the great purpose of penalty in respect to me has been accomplished, and that I may now be properly treated as if I had not offended?

As this inquiry pertains to the very essence of the Christian scheme, as it bears on the feelings of the guilty, and relates to a question which must always occur to the mind of the guilty, it is proper to refer to a few facts and principles which may tend to illustrate and answer it.

(1.) As a matter of fact, under the Divine administration, the evil of sin or crime is perhaps more frequently seen by the effects produced on those who are innocent than by any direct and immediate effect on the guilty themselves. It is somehow a great principle under the Divine government, that the effects of our conduct often pass over from the offender himself to those who are associated with him; and that when we undertake to estimate the *evil* of the offence, or to obtain a just *measure* of the crime, we more naturally look to those effects than to anything which has as yet occurred to the offender himself. Nay, the mind of the offender himself *may* be more deeply affected as to the evil of the crime committed by the sufferings which he perceives that his conduct has caused to others than by any pain or privation which he himself has endured. Society is full of instances of this kind, and perhaps in the case of a large portion of the crimes committed in a community, the actual amount of suffering endured by the offender himself is small, if it might not even be said to be trifling, as compared with the sufferings which the offence has brought on others. The man who suffers in a penitentiary, solitary and alone, perhaps learns to bear the punishment inflicted with patience, or sinks into insensibility or stupidity, or invents some mitigation of his own sufferings; but while thus insensible comparatively to the effects of his own crime, and to the evil of the offence, his

conduct may have brought the grey hairs of a father or a mother to the grave, or the sorrows of a broken—hearted wife, sister, or daughter, may be the public testimony to the evil of the offence, and may do more to impress a sense of that evil on the community than all that he endures in the loneliness and forgetfulness of his dungeon. Now, if we suppose that it had been designed beforehand to make an arrangement which would most deeply impress upon the community the evil of the offence committed, we should say that apparently the design was to show that evil to the largest extent by the collateral and incidental sufferings that would come on the innocent. The point now is not to inquire into the reason of this arrangement, or to show its justice; but simply to advert to the fact that the evil of transgression may be seen in a very high degree, and so as possibly to affect the mind of the offender himself by the sufferings which a certain course of conduct would bring on the innocent. If we suppose that those sufferings were in any sense voluntarily assumed, the principle would not be varied; for still the whole effect *might* be in some way to illustrate the evil of the offence, or to divide with the offender the sufferings produced by his crime.

(2.) The great doctrine of the Christian atonement is, not that there was any natural connection between the sinner and the Redeemer; not that, as in the case above supposed, the consequences of the sinner's offence passed over by any natural law to the Savior, so as to involve him in poverty, pain, and death, but that by a voluntary arrangement he was willing so to take the place of the offender that, as in the case of natural relationship, the evil effect of transgression should be illustrated, and the Divine sense of the nature of sin should be manifested by his sufferings as if they had been endured by the sinner himself. In other words, such an amount of suffering was appointed, and was submitted to, as would to the sinner himself, and to the universe at large, be a just measure of the Divine sense of the evil of transgression, and in this respect accomplish the same effect as if the sinner had himself endured the penalty of the law.

(3.) In the work of the atonement as viewed by the sinner under conviction for sin, looking at the Redeemer as suffering in his stead, the great idea which is presented to his mind is still that which is manifest in the personal sufferings produced by sins, and in the voluntary or involuntary sufferings endured by others on our account—to wit, *the connection between sin and suffering*. It is seen there, as elsewhere, that the only cause of suffering is sin. The Redeemer suffered from no other cause. There was no other conceivable reason why he should suffer. There is no statement made—no intimation whatever—that he *did* suffer from any other cause. No reason can be given, drawn from any views of the Divine government which we can obtain, why the sufferings of the garden and the cross came upon him, unless it was from some connection with sin. Without such a connection, and without some design of evincing the nature of sin by his sufferings, it would be impossible to vindicate the Divine character in permitting these sufferings to come upon the only Being in our world who has been in all respects perfectly innocent. The Scripture statement, moreover, everywhere is, that he *did* thus suffer on account of sin:—that he “died the just for the unjust;” that he was the “propitiation for our sins;” that “the chastisement of our peace was upon him;” that “the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all;” that “by his stripes we are healed;” and that “he died for our offences, and was raised for our justification.” The point of the remark now made is,

that this may be so perceived by the mind itself to be the design of the Savior's sufferings, that one who is conscious of guilt may see that in those sufferings there has been a real expression of a Divine sense of the evil of sin, intentionally made, an expression as real, though it may not be in the same form, as if the sinner himself had endured the same sufferings as a part of the penalty of the law.

(4.) One other remark only it seems necessary to make to complete the statement of the effect produced by the atonement in giving peace to a mind troubled with the consciousness of sin: it is, that the sufferings endured by the Redeemer in the place of the sinner are fitted to make a deeper impression on the universe at large than would be produced by the punishment of the sinner himself. If a sinner is lost, he is so in more senses than one;—lost not only to hope and happiness, but also in the sense that his individual sufferings may make little, if any, impression on the universe at large. He has in himself no such rank, or dignity, or exaltation, and he sustains no such relations, as to attract attention beyond a very limited sphere. The *aggregate* sufferings of the guilty may, indeed, make a deep and wide impression; but the sufferings of an individual must be limited in the sphere of their influence, and the moral effect will be comparatively unfelt. Few of all the creatures that God has made will be aware of his suffering, and even on those few the impression produced will be comparatively slight. None of these remarks, however, apply to the sufferings of the Redeemer, considered as endured in the place of sinners. His exalted dignity as the Son of God; the adoration paid him by the angelic hosts; his rank and office as Mediator; the changes that may have been produced in heaven by his incarnation; his poverty and lowliness of estate on earth; his life of weariness and toil; and pre—eminently his sufferings on the cross, were all fitted to attract the attention of the universe at large, and to produce a deep impression on distant worlds. Far as those wonderful events were known,—and if he was, indeed, the incarnate Deity, they would be known throughout all worlds, —the inquiry must have occurred, why he stooped to so low a condition; why he endured so many sufferings in his life; and why, as a malefactor, and between malefactors, he died on a cross. Whether the design of that death was known to other worlds at the time it occurred, cannot indeed now be ascertained; but it will be ultimately known that it was intended to express, to the utmost degree possible, the Divine sense of the evil of sin—the very object which would be accomplished by the punishment of the sinner himself. Throughout the universe, therefore, an impression would be made by the atonement of the evil of sin, more deep and lasting than would be produced by the natural course of the administration of justice; and if that impression is secured, it is clear that every obstacle to the pardon of the sinner is removed, and that he may be forgiven without any of the incidental evils against which it has been impossible to guard in the exercise of pardon by human governments.

If this is so, the troubled conscience may have peace. All has been done that *can* be done to show the evil of transgression, and to prevent the consequences which would flow from the exercise of pardon were it granted without an atonement. All has been done that *needs* to be done to express the Divine sense of the value of law, of the ill—desert of transgression, and of the magnitude of an offence against the government of God. God has shown that while he pardons he is not indifferent to the claims of his own law, and that while he “ justifies the

ungodly," he has a supreme regard for truth and holiness, and will maintain the interests of justice at all times, and at every sacrifice. The pardoned sinner, therefore, may have peace. He is not only assured of pardon, but he is assured that it is extended in such a way that the honor of God is maintained, and the great interests of the universe secured. He can see that the obstacles which existed to the exercise of pardon have been wholly removed, and removed in such a way that every interest of justice is safe. Sunken, degraded, and lost as he is; conscious of deep depravity and of ill—desert; feeling that his appropriate place would be with the lost; and feeling too—for that can never be forgotten—that he will always retain the recollection of his having been a violator of law, and that he can occupy only a very humble place before the throne,—yet he may feel also that God is glorified by his salvation, and every attribute of the Deity illustrated and magnified by his admission into heaven. He enjoys the favor of God, not because God disregards law, but even while he shows his respect for it, and magnifies it. He becomes an heir of glory, not by any favoritism that is regardless of justice and of the rights of others, but while the rights of others are as much respected as his own, and while they are rendered still more secure by the method of his own salvation. He enters heaven over no prostrate law; he dwells there not in defiance of the claims of justice; he wears a crown of glory not tarnished by the conviction that it is bestowed in violation of right; but while associated forever with unfallen beings, with the angels that have not left "their first estate,"—he feels that he is there in virtue of a righteousness not less glorious than theirs, for it is the righteousness of the Son of God. The atonement has thus removed the obstacles to the way of pardon; the agitations of guilt in the soul die away; light, hope, and joy break in upon the mind, and the sinner finds peace.